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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 008704

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EG](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: NEA A/S WELCH AND ARAB LEAGUE SYG DISCUSS GAZA,
IRAQ CONFERENCE, SYRIA

REF: CAIRO 8618 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified by Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone for reasons
1.4(b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: In a November 17 meeting with NEA Assistant Secretary C. David Welch and the Ambassador, Arab League Secretary General Amre Moussa expressed his congratulations to the USG on brokering the Agreement on Movement and Access (the "Agreement"). Moussa also provided an update on planning for the November 19 Iraq preparatory conference and shared his views on the potential for progress in the Mehlis investigation. On Gaza, Moussa said the agreement was significant, but the core issue of settlements must be addressed to achieve real progress. On Iraq, Moussa said he is confident that the "national accord" process the League is pursuing via the prepcon can coexist with Iraq's legitimate political process. He also noted that logistics for the conference and attendees remain up in the air. On Syria, Moussa said that he is confident that President Asad will cooperate with Mehlis. End summary.

The Agreement on Movement and Access

2. (C) Moussa praised the USG for brokering the Agreement, noting in particular the Secretary's personal efforts to make the deal. But, he qualified, the Agreement does not address the heart of the problem -- stopping the settlements. According to Moussa, giving money, supporting Abu Mazen, and making sure Gaza is not a prison are important U.S. contributions, but improving the demographic nature of the conflict requires a moratorium on settlements and agreement on the wall. NEA A/S Welch underlined the significance of the November 15 Agreement and the Administration's attention to the settlements and barrier issues and larger objectives. A/S Welch noted that (1) the USG hosted Abu Mazen in Washington D.C. twice; (2) the Secretary has visited the region four times; and (3) U.S. financial support for the Palestinians is second highest (per capita) in the world (second to Israel alone). A/S Welch pressed Moussa to give Abu Mazen greater support and the U.S. greater credit for our efforts and results.

Iraq National Accord Prepcon

3. (C) Moussa stressed to NEA A/S Welch and the Ambassador that the national accord prepcon would "put Iraq on a track" towards reconciliation. Noting that many conference attendees have not spoken to each other for years, Moussa said that giving them an opportunity to vent for three days would be healthy. The League, Moussa explained, aims to show all factions that it is time to be serious and that "this is not a souk." He also said the League could have a calming influence on the groups and persuade them that Shia/Sunni and Arab/Persian divisions are particularly destructive. Moussa observed that he believes the pivotal question for all the Iraqi factions, especially the Shias is: "Who is the boss?" He hoped that the prepcon dialogue could start to persuade the Iranians that a stable Iraq is in their interest.

4. (C) As for prepcon logistics, Moussa reconfirmed his previous report (reftel) that the prepcon agenda includes discussing the date, time and place for the next national accord conference as well as the agenda and mechanism for selecting participants. He noted, however, that he would use the prepcon to urge greater participation in the legitimate political process. The opening session, he said, would be huge and televised, at least in part. Moussa said that he, President Mubarak, President Talabani, and PM Jafari would all speak before the cameras. There may also be other speakers during the opening, including possibly SCIRI head Abdel Azziz al Hakim, Dr. Ayad al Allawi, and Muslim Ulama Council head Harith al Dhari. The list of speakers for the opening session is not/not yet final, Moussa underlined.

5. (C) NEA A/S Welch pressed Moussa to turn the cameras off and dismiss all observers after speeches by the elected government officials. It would not be useful, A/S Welch and the Ambassador underlined, to put non-elected figures on par with the head of government or head of state. Noting that nations in the Arab world take their cue from the League, NEA

A/S Welch urged Moussa to lead to unify, and not to alienate, the groups. The U.S. does not want the prepcon to be a forum for public disputes, A/S Welch added. Moussa responded that that even if some Sunni opposition figures do speak at the opening, the majority of speakers would be Shia or other government officials. Moussa also stressed the importance of hearing all views and said that even Harith al Dhari, for example, now favors gradual MNF-I withdrawal and has pledged to be "constructive." The Ambassador again pressed Moussa to limit public speakers to elected officials. But Moussa made no firm commitment, and remarked that he is "still playing with" the decision as to "when to turn off the cameras" during the first session.

Mehlis

16. (C) Moussa told NEA A/S Welch and the Ambassador that he is confident that President Asad will cooperate with Mehlis. But, he said, the location of Mehlis questioning of Syrian suspects is not important. Rather, Moussa said, everyone should focus on getting the truth. Moussa said he heard that Jebel al Sheikh (under the UN flag) is under consideration as a possible questioning site. NEA A/S Welch said that the USG wants only straight cooperation with Mehlis. Whatever venue Mehlis wants is the key, he concluded, and Moussa agreed.

17. (U) A/S Welch did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

RICCIARDONE